

2 Getting Started

This segment will help you to get started with Catholic Connections. First it describes details about the program and section features. Then it describes specific “getting started” tasks and provides a checklist for your planning.

2

Features of Catholic Connections

Section Design

Each of the six Catholic Connections sections offers the following:

- Scripture study and faith development sessions in the handbook, supported by the appropriate catechist guide
- two or more life issues sessions presented in the guide only
- Guide features: a detailed presentation of each session in the handbook; an activity handout; and a chapter summary handout outlining the main points of instruction in the handbook chapter.

Scripture Study and Faith Development Sessions

Each of the Scripture study and faith development sessions uses a chapter topic from the *CCH* as a starting point and, in the appropriate guide, incorporates active learning strategies to help the participants understand the topic and explore its significance for their lives. The program as a whole provides fifty sessions, with an additional ten life issues sessions offered in the guides.

Life Issues Sessions

The two or more life issues sessions in each catechist guide focus on issues that relate to young people’s lives, exploring those issues in light of material introduced during the faith development sessions. The Scripture study sessions, the faith development sessions, and the life issues sessions all aim to help the participants make important connections between the Catholic faith and their lives. The two types of sessions differ only in their starting points. The program as a whole provides ten life issues sessions.

“Catechesis most effectively promotes the faith development of . . . adolescents when the curriculum is focused on important faith themes drawn from the teachings of the Church and on the developmental needs and life experiences of adolescents.” —Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry (USCCB [Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997], page 30. Copyright © 1997 by the USCCB. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the USCCB.)

Time Frame for Sessions

The sessions in the three catechist guides are designed to work in periods of 60 to 90 minutes. The sessions include fully designed 60-minute main lessons with optional suggestions to extend the time frame of the lesson to 90 minutes. Additional resources for extending sessions are easy to find in the *CCH*. Here are several suggestions:

- *Think About It!* Each chapter in the handbook has a Think About It! article. The catechists can use these as the basis for discussion and reflection during sessions.
- *Images*. The handbook contains many images with captions well suited to sparking individual reflection and group discussion.
- *People of Faith*. Over half the chapters in the handbook include People of Faith profiles and illustrations that depict key elements of the lives of faithful people. The catechists and the participants may enjoy exploring these during sessions.
- Each chapter in the handbook has a Church History article, relating the history of the Church to the faith topic and often bringing the topic forward to contemporary practice.
- Each chapter includes a Liturgy Connection article, encouraging active and thoughtful participation in the Church's liturgical year. Applying these topics to individual practice makes for practical discussion.

What's in Each Session?

Each session has four components: (1) a Pray It! segment found in the guide only and led by the catechist, or found in the Pray It! article in the *CCH*; (2) a Study It! segment; (3) a Live It! segment; and (4) a Pray It! segment found in the *CCH*. Each component is assigned a suggested time or time range.

The Study It! part of each session aims to capture the participants' attention, help them to understand an aspect of Catholic teaching, and guide them in applying the teaching to their lives. The detailed session steps help the catechists to achieve these goals through a wide variety of approaches meant to relate to the many ways young people learn. Typically divided into three sections, each session has a suggestion for beginning with a simple activity or discussion to prepare the young people for the content. This is followed by reading or presenting the session's content in the *CCH*. A suggestion for reviewing the session content through questions and discussion is also provided.

“Catechetical methodology must exhibit a twofold fidelity. On the one hand, it must be faithful to God and to his Revelation; on the other, it must respect the liberty and promote the active participation of those being catechized.”

— National Directory for Catechesis (USCCB [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005], page 94. Copyright © 2005 by the USCCB. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the USCCB.)

Each session is based on one chapter of the *CCH*. Each chapter of the guide corresponds to a chapter in the handbook and leads the catechist through the session page by page. Each session is presented in a two-page spread so that the entire lesson can be taught without flipping back and forth between pages.

Each session also provides a closing prayer that usually includes a prayer found in the handbook. This makes it convenient for the catechists to invite everyone to say the same prayer together.

As mentioned earlier, the sessions include instructions for optional session extensions. These are accompanied by notes about where they best fit into the overall session plans.

Strategies for Helping Young People to Pay Attention

Capturing and keeping the attention of young adolescents can be a challenge for the catechists whether or not their groups include participants with diagnosed attention problems. Catechist tip sheets, found in this online resource, discuss attention issues, offer numerous easy-to-implement strategies, and identify techniques to avoid. Encourage catechists to spend time reading and discussing this information with you before their sessions begin or at times when group management issues arise during a session.

Reach Out to Parents

Parents play a critical role in the faith formation of their children, even when the young people have reached the middle school grades. Though the course sessions are designed for catechists meeting with the participants on their own, we encourage you to keep parents informed and to involve them whenever feasible. The Catholic Connections program offers you and the catechists a few concrete ways to reach out to parents:

- Send the handbook home with the participants. This will give parents an informal way to learn along with their children and, ideally, this will spark family faith conversations.
- Distribute the session overviews and tip sheets to parents. This online resource includes reproducible course overview handouts to make this easy. This online resource also includes two reproducible tip sheets for parents, one on the developmental characteristics of young adolescents and the other on three key family faith activities: conversation, ritual, and service.
- Invite parents to participate in life issues lessons. Adults may be grouped together, and class discussion can be enriched by their responses to the activities. In this way, parents can be made aware of faith-related “talking points” on topics that almost certainly will come up at home.

Checklist for Getting Started

Coordinator's Checklist		
Task	Who Should Be Involved?	Completion Date
1. Determine schedule.	_____	_____
2. Secure meeting spaces.	_____	_____
3. Plan for special events.	_____	_____
4. Prepare registration materials.	_____	_____
5. Recruit catechists.	_____	_____
6. Train catechists.	_____	_____
7. Gather supplies.	_____	_____
8. Plan for evaluation.	_____	_____

1. Determine Schedule

Review the six sections and the information about scheduling options and section sequence (see chapter 3 in this online resource) and determine the schedule for your group's program.

2. Secure Meeting Spaces

Consider the number of sessions you will offer at a particular time and the approximate number of participants who will be attending, and reserve the needed meeting spaces. Some sessions include field trips to the worship space, so it would be ideal if your program could be held at a time when the worship space is available.

“Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere.” —Pope John Paul II (*On Catechesis in Our Time [Catechesi Tradendae]*, number 68, at www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html.
Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

3. Plan for Special Events

If you opt to include parents in some sessions, and if you want to include end-of-program meals or celebrations, plan these early so everyone gets the dates on their calendars. If your circumstances allow, you may want to combine groups and have the catechists work together on end-of-program meals or celebrations. If you offer two or three programs per year, you have two or three great opportunities for family-oriented celebrations.

4. Prepare Registration Materials

Maybe the better way to think of this task is to prepare “invitations.” Of course, it is important to convey all the times, dates, and deadlines to parents. If you can, though, consider sending invitations directly to the young people you hope to reach through your program.

2

5. Recruit Catechists

This is fifth in the list here, but ideally this is an ongoing effort throughout the year. Be on the lookout for parishioners who have the gifts to work effectively as catechists for middle-school-aged youth. Even if you already have all the catechists you need, you can invite new recruits to participate in training and to shadow more experienced catechists for a year.

6. Train Catechists

Be prepared to gather your catechists and review the features of the sessions and the catechist guides. Plan training opportunities that match the needs and experience levels of your catechists. Encourage the catechists to take advantage of additional opportunities offered by regional and diocesan catechetical leaders.

You may also want to make use of the reproducible catechist tip sheets offered in this online resource. Topics include adolescent development, active learning, effective storytelling, effective group management, enhancing participants’ attention, and using Scripture in faith formation.

7. Gather Supplies

Each session includes a “Preparation and Supplies” section. Review these and determine which materials you will provide. Will you supply everything needed, or will you supply the basics and ask the catechists to gather special items? The basics include the following:

- a Bible
- copies of the handbook, one for each participant
- pens or pencils, one for each participant
- a large blackboard, chalk, and an eraser; or a large whiteboard and markers
- supplies for creating a prayer space, such as a prayer table, a table covering, a Bible and stand, a cross, a candle and matches (if permitted)

Specialty items are those things that are used just once or infrequently. This might depend on how a catechist chooses to implement a particular activity. Please note that the supplies needed for the session extensions are listed as “optional” in the “Preparation and Supplies” list.

Some sessions provide the catechists with optional activities that require electronic equipment. Let the catechists know what kind of equipment is available to them.

8. Plan for Evaluation

From the start of your program, make plans for evaluation. Plan to seek input from the participants, the parents, and the catechists. You will learn things that will be invaluable for your program in the future.